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ABSTRACT

A study investigated the development of theme as five fifth-grade students read children's literature, recorded their responses in logs, and discussed their ideas in small, student-led peer groups. The five students met together as one group over the course of 5 weeks as they read historical fiction focused on Japan during World War II. Data included student logs, transcripts of their discussions, field notes, and student interviews. Results indicated: (1) student thinking about themes presented by texts varied over time; (2) instruction played a key role in the development of response; (3) students needed multiple means through which to express their response and developing ideas about theme; and (4) teachers need not dominate student interactions to insure they comprehend text and develop a sense of relevant themes. Findings suggest that students' ideas, as represented through their logs and discussions, develop as a result of increased opportunities to read, write, think about, and discuss the ideas presented in texts and that instruction should include such opportunities within reading programs. (Three tables representing original and revised predictions of students about the stories they read and five figures of students' drawings of events in the stories are included; 61 references and an explanation of transcript notations are attached.) (Author/RS)

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Susan I. McMahon

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Susan I. McMahon

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Abstract

This study investigated the development of theme as five fifth-grade students read children's literature, recorded their responses in logs, and discussed their ideas in small, student-led peer groups. The five students met together as one group over the course of five weeks as they read historical fiction focused on Japan during World War II. Data included student logs, transcripts of their discussions, field notes, and student interviews. Findings from this study revealed four things: (a) student thinking about themes presented by text varies over time, (b) instruction plays a key role the development of response, (c) students need multiple means through which to express their response and developing ideas about theme, and (d) teachers need not dominate student interactions to insure they comprehend text and develop a sense of relevant themes. Implications from this work reveal that students' ideas, as represented through their logs and discussions, develop as a result of increased opportunities to read, write, think about, and discuss the ideas presented in texts. Therefore, instruction should include such opportunities within reading program.

BOOK CLUB DISCUSSIONS: A CASE STUDY OF FIVE STUDENTS CONSTRUCTING THEMES FROM LITERARY TEXTS

Susan I. McMahon[1]

Recently, educators have called for a change, from the current skills-based approach to reading instruction to a literature-based one (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1984; Cullinan, 1987). Such reform includes more than merely a transfer from the use of basal readers and their accompanying workbooks to the use of children's literature. Advocates for modifications in current reading instruction are also supporting changes in the instructional context that would significantly alter teaching and learning in elementary classrooms. Such changes require teachers and learners to modify their thinking about learning not only in terms of what they read, but also in terms of the activities associated with reading. Methods teachers use to represent, record, and discuss ideas influence how children respond to reading; therefore, those hoping to implement changes in how children learn to read need to consider all factors associated with learning, including the social context.

The following study explored how students participating within a literature-based reading program developed various themes as they read, wrote, and discussed issues of interest to them while reading books set during World War II in Japan. This report begins by presenting the theoretical perspective from which the study was conceived. It then proceeds to review some of the relevant literature that calls for reforms in reading instruction, particularly in terms of the written representations used to assess learning, the interactional patterns within classrooms, and finally the purposes for reading which focus on the higher order thinking associated with reading such as the students' ability to articulate themes. Next, the study is described in terms of the context, the participants, and the methodology. The results are reported in a descriptive narrative. Finally, this report ends with both the theoretical and practical implications of this work.

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Theoretical Perspective

Social constructivism provides a relevant and current perspective on the study of literature-based reading instruction. While literary critics and educational researchers have argued about where meaning resides (i.e., in the text, the reader, or as a result of the interaction between the two), a social constructivist perspective emphasizes the interaction among reader, text, and social context. Thus, rather then being viewed as a potentially "messy" variable that cannot be ignored, the social context is recognized as actively contributing to the construction of meaning. Meaning results from this interaction, rather than existing within any one aspect of it. Therefore, individuals construct meaning through their social interactions and adopt particular speech genres appropriate for particular social situations (Bakhtin, 1986).

By placing such an emphasis on interactions, the social constructivist perspective emphasizes the role of language used within a context on the development of an individual's thought processes. Adoption of this perspective provides insight into research on literature-based reading programs, a viewpoint consistent with Vygotsky's (1986) emphasis on the importance of focusing on the process of the learner's development, including the role of language on the development of thought. Where thought and language intercept is verbal thought. While some experiences might be recorded within verbal thought, others, such as those connected with the arts, might not. Although we may be unable initially to express our response when it rests within nonverbal thought, instruction focused on response to literature may help learners find ways of becoming more articulate in expressing these images in language.

Getting to Know the Readers' Written Response: Representing Ideas

Proponents of a literature-based reading program argue that children need a variety of ways to represent the reading experience. These methods of instruction are more influential on the ease or difficulty of a text than the particular texts themselves (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1989). The most frequent method of getting students to represent their thinking about text is writing. That reading and writing are related in substantive ways has been documented across a range of studies

using a variety of methodological approaches (see McCarthey & Raphael, 1989; Tierney & Shanahan, 1991). Intervention studies have suggested that writing can influence reading and reading can influence writing (Colvin-Murphy, 1986; Marshall, 1987). Correlational studies (e.g., Shanahan, 1984) suggest shared cognitive processes. Therefore, evidence exists that reading and writing are processes that complement one another and promote student growth.

At the same time, written response to literature is often difficult because initial response is vague. While having several ideas filled with illusions to emotional effects, the reader cannot always elaborate or make specific her response. Therefore, students could benefit from more opportunities to write during the process of reading (Applebee, 1989; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1989). However, teachers are hesitant to require writing along with reading literature because they find it inconsistent with their beliefs that reading be enjoyable (Walmsley & Walp, 1989). As a result, they often do not provide students sufficient opportunities to write during or after reading.

An additional problem with written response is that it frequently becomes the sole means by which teachers ask students to represent their ideas regarding text; however, such reliance on written answers is problematic since a student's written response often varies from oral ones (Beach, 1973) and younger children may rely more on acting out an understanding than on verbal explanation (Hickman, 1983). In addition, classroom dependence on written response might lead to student dependence on writing as the sole means of representing thinking. Such an over-reliance on a single basis of mental representation might have a negative impact on learning (Spiro, Coulson, Feltovich, & Anderson, 1988). Therefore, while teachers might improve their reading programs with additional writing experiences for their students, they might also foster more critical thinking by encouraging other ways for students to represent ideas.

Since learners might benefit from representing ideas in multiple ways, some have argued for significant changes in how teachers assess and promote the reading process. Huck, Hepler, and Hickmann (1987) have suggested that literature teachers might follow the lead of mathematics teachers by providing concrete manipulatives for students. Cianciolo (1988) suggests that teachers

provide multiple activities in which students can express and clarify their understanding of and response to literature. These activities might include art, writing, games, crafts, and cooking.

In work exploring multiple ways of representing ideas, Saul (1989) found that preservice teachers were more likely to move away from comprehension-type questions when they were asked to draw ideas they had while reading. In addition, Pellegrini and Galda (1988) investigated the influence of play props on preschool children's generation of stories. These props were categorized as "functionally ambiguous" such as, wooden blocks or styrofoam shapes, and "functionally explicit" such as, doctor's kits or dolls. These researchers found that children appear to be able to construct more elaborated stories when they have the freedom to explore possibilities with ambiguous props than with those for which there was a specific purpose.

In a study exploring the relationship between fifth graders' involvement in and comprehension of a fictional short story, Tierney and Edmiston (1991) asked children to create visual representations from the story. They concluded that the comprehension of involved readers, as evidenced through the representations and interviews, creates vivid images of people, places, and events.

While there is evidence of a connection between reading and writing and evidence that learners need to represent their ideas in multiple ways, little is known about how teachers can implement such changes in their classrooms. If teachers and students are used to traditional paper-and-pencil tasks, further research examining how innovations integrating reading, writing, oral response, and other forms of representation into the elementary classroom is needed to explore how such varied representations of ideas impacts and/or reflects student thinking about text.

Getting to Know the Readers' Oral Response: Discussions Within the Classroom Context

Reformers argue that teachers provide students more latitude in the questions they pursue as a part of reading. Instead of the questions found listed in a basal text, they argue that (a) teachers construct questions that recognize and promote individual student interests and

(b) students seek answers to their own inquiries based on the purposes students themselves establish (Applebee & Langer, 1983; Bruner, 1983; Langer, 1986).

Since what questions teachers ask will influence what children learn (Marshall, Klages, & Fehlman, 1990; Wixson, 1983), instruction hoping to focus on the meaning-making process of reading needs to include authentic questions which probe student ideas and allow the students to examine, elaborate, reconsider, and revise their thinking (Nystrand, 1990). Such changes in the interactional pattern are supported by theory that learning literacy is an extension of earlier learning activities between a parent and a child, such as those described by Vygotsky (1978) and that the teacher's language can function as a "scaffold" for the learner (Applebee & Langer, 1983; Bruner, 1983; Langer, 1986; Langer & Applebee, 1984). Flood and Lapp (1988) suggest three areas of reader response the teacher should pursue through questioning: (a) ideas about self, (b) ideas about the text, and (c) ideas about the context in which they read and responded.

In addition to changing the interactional pattern between the teacher and students, reformers call for increased dialogues among children (Short, 1990; Smith, 1986), arguing that readers exist within a community of readers (Fish, 1980) who share certain ideas, reactions, and beliefs about texts. This community shares some similar background which helps create similar meanings. Such ideas are in concert with Bakhtin's (1986) notions of the construction of meaning in social contexts. Meaning does not exist outside the social context and each person, also a member in other social groups, helps the community construct meaning. Since the group is important for students' development of response, teachers need to provide opportunities for interaction so learners can make connections between their own experiences and the text. Evidence exists that making connections orally within such a community is influential in reading of and learning from expository (Palincsar, 1986; Palincsar & Brown, 1984) and literary (Eeds & Wells, 1989; Huck, 1990; Smith, 1991) texts.

Such reform requires significant alterations in the instructional context. Instead of homogeneously grouped students interacting solely with the teacher, advocates for change argue

that students should be: (a) grouped heterogeneously, (b) provided opportunities to contribute ideas about the direction and content of discussions, and (c) afforded a variety of occasions to interact. Such opportunities include whole-group, small-group, paired, and individual activities. While many accounts of successful uses of such groupings exist, little research has investigated how instruction that includes such changes in interactional patterns foster greater student understanding of text.

Getting Students to See Multiple Purposes of Reading: The Development of Theme

In classrooms in which teachers and students adopt more traditional approaches, learning appears to be easily measured because knowledge is divided into discrete bits of information that can be easily tested. In fact, much prior research in reading has measured student proficiency in terms of recalls, think-alouds, and tests using reading formulas or multiple choice tests (Beach & Hynds, 1992). However, such instruction and research consider neither the complexity of literacy acquisition nor the role of the context as individual children learn to read, write, and respond over time. In traditional classrooms, students come to define reading as the acquisition of discrete skills and strategies (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1984; Goodman, Shannon, Freeman, & Murphy, 1988) instead of the multiple faceted process it is. Since literacy development is complex, particular aspects of understanding text cannot be isolated. Instead, educators and researchers need to focus on the many components of reading, including the higher order thinking that is associated with a critical stance. For example, one area to pursue might be students' developing a sense of theme as they engage with literature in multiple ways across several texts.

The theme of any work of literature reveals the author's purpose (Huck, Hepler, & Hickman, 1987) through an idea or ideas that hold it together (Lukens, 1982). Students can demonstrate their knowledge of theme by being able to move beyond a literal interpretation of the text to make abstract connections linking ideas within and across texts in general terms (Lehr, 1991). The development of a sense of theme requires time to step back from the text and reflect on

the reading experience. Therefore, to study its development, research must investigate students' response to text over time.

Since current reformers have called for theme-based instruction (see for instance Schon, 1983), many basal texts have organized their literature selections by various themes. While the goal may be to help students and teachers make connections across readings, the ideas presented in the accompanying materials come across as fragmented and not facilitating student understanding (Rosaen & Cantlon, 1991). Therefore, current texts used to teach reading may help neither teachers nor students develop a sense of theme. Instead of using pre-packaged units, perhaps providing teachers with general guidelines for a thematic unit might facilitate planning for thematic units for particular students (Rosaen & Cantlon, 1991). By developing a sense of theme, students can begin to identify with characters and to see larger, universal issues frequently the focus of quality literature.

We are just beginning to understand the capabilities of young children to develop a sense of theme. For example, Lehr (1988) has found that children as young as kindergarten appeared to have some sense of theme and that, by fourth grade, they seemed to have a sense of thematic connections in texts. In recent work, Au (1992) studied the role of discussion as a third-grade teacher and her students considered the theme of a short story, "Magic in a Glass Jar" (Bacmeister, 1964) over the course of four days. She found that, while the teacher had planned to pursue one particular theme through small group discussion, some of these third graders had developed their own ideas about relevant themes and preferred to discuss these.

While these studies have provided some insight into how students develop a sense of theme, further work can help us understand how this happens over an extended period of time across several texts.

Conclusion

Despite increased knowledge about student response to literature, research is needed to explore such response as part of a literature-based reading program. While researchers call for

more writing related to student response, we do not know which types of writing best support developing response in such a program. In addition, since there is little evidence of genuine dialogue focused on authentic questions in elementary classrooms, we do not know how this influences students' reading experiences. Further, while there is a significant body of literature describing the success of practitioners as they have created a community of readers in a language arts classroom, little empirical work investigating this process exists.

Therefore, this study examined the issues raised by current calls for reform in reading instruction to answer the following question: How will (a) written log entries, (b) discussions within student-led but teacher-directed heterogeneous groups, and (c) drawn representations contribute to the development of student thinking about themes presented in texts? To address this, the study was conducted within a classroom in which the teacher included (a) opportunities in which students could represent their ideas through both written and illustrated means before, during, and after reading and (b) daily group interactions in which children had increased opportunities to verbalize their thinking and observe peers attempting the same.

Method

The study was based on assumptions of what Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) call "naturalistic tradition" and Bogdan and Biklen (1982) call "qualitative research." To understand the setting of an elementary classroom in which the teacher was implementing literature-based reading instruction, I needed to spend time within that classroom trying to understand such changes through the eyes of the participants. I was interested in the process children went through as they attempted to understand this new approach to reading instruction. As a regular observer in the classroom, I was a primary instrument in the data collection. The purpose of this section is to outline the methodology as I explain (a) the context, (b) the participants, and (c) the methods of data collection and analysis.

Instructional Setting

I conducted the study in a Midwestern, urban, fifth-grade classroom. The student population of the classroom and school represents that of the neighborhood: 46% Caucasian, 30% African American, 18% Hispanic, 4% Asian, and 1% Native American. The majority of parents are unemployed and received Aid for Dependent Children; of those who do work, most hold cashier or service jobs in local department stores, food stores, or fast-food restaurants. A very small percentage hold positions such as teachers' aides or secretaries. Most of the children come from single-parent homes.

The school district outlined curriculum requirements for reading and writing, revised in 1990. Generally, these requirements emphasize the inclusion of literature in reading instruction and a writing program that focuses on process and student choice. In the classroom in which I conducted the study, the teacher was implementing, for the first time, a literature-based reading program, called Book Club.

Book Club components. The Book Club reading program incorporated four components: (a) reading, (b) writing/representation, (c) instruction, and (d) discussion. While these components were present every day, the order and time allotment varied depending on the needs of that day's lesson. Each of these had additional related strategies for teaching and learning literature.

Since a literature-based program required the teacher to select many of the books, she made her decisions based on recognition of the book as quality work and on the interests and needs of the students (Purves & Beach, 1972; Sims, 1983). For the period of this study, she chose selections focusing on the theme of war: *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes* (Coerr, 1977), *Hiroshima No Pika* (Maruki, 1982), and *Faithful Elephants* (Yukio, 1988).

In addition to the selection of the books, the teacher was concerned with increasing student ability to read and interact around text through a variety of methods, including reading silently, orally, in pairs, and listening to the teacher or a peer read orally. The teacher also incorporated

reading skills and strategies identified in the district's curriculum guide, such as prediction, summarizing, and sequencing.

One major difference between a more traditional approach to reading and this program was the inclusion of opportunities to express personal response both in writing and through illustration throughout the reading process. Two types of materials were used for instruction and assessment: (a) reading logs, based on the ideas proposed by researchers who suggest that journals provide an important means for students to reflect about their reading, to encourage close reading of text, and to prepare for later sharing of their ideas (Atwell, 1988; Fulwiler, 1982; Gambrell, 1985; O'Sullivan, 1987; Reed, 1988) and (b) think-sheets, based on ideas of Raphael and Englert (1990) who suggest that students benefit from having prompts that serve as a basis for thinking and for dialogues about text, which provided culmination of the reading experience.

The instructional component included all teacher-led activities designed to support and facilitate both what and how students could share ideas through representations and during discussions (Raphael & McMahon, et al., 1991).

Discussion provided students opportunities to interact over text in two different social contexts: (a) total-class discussions, called Community Share and (b) small group interactions, called Book Club.

This reading program included all four components every day. Generally, the teacher followed a similar pattern. Each day she began with a review of the previous day's reading, followed by the instructional focus for that day. This focus might include how to record an idea or what ideas students might consider for Book Club discussions. Then students read the assigned section of the book. This reading might be silent or aloud; it might also be as a whole group or in pairs. After students completed their reading, they recorded their ideas in their logs. Before Book Club, the teacher reminded them of possible topics to share and, as they met in Book Club, students discussed issues relevant to them. After Book Club, the entire class participated in

Community Share in which representatives from each Book Club related to the class a summary of what their Club had discussed that day.

Participants

Five students were the focus of this study: three boys and two girls. All participated within in the same Book Club group for the duration of the study. Mondo,[2] an 11 year-old Hispanic boy, came from a home in which Spanish is the primary language spoken. According to the teacher, Mondo was low academically but worked hard and always turned in his assignments. He was having difficulty in most content areas and reading below grade level. Mondo reported that he did not read nor write well and preferred to draw.

Martisse was a 10 year-old African American girl the teacher described as having very high academic ability, being a very good reader, and capable of handling all fifth-grade work easily. Martisse revealed that she enjoyed reading and often read when at home.

Lissa, a Caucasian, was an average student who seemed to want to do well in school but was not always successful. The teacher described her as an average student who had received D's in many subjects because she had become involved in too many extracurricular activities, tended to rush through her work, and sometimes neglected to turn it in to the teacher. Reading at grade level, Lissa said she loved books and reported reading at home.

Chris, an African American boy, was a quiet student of low ability. The teacher related that he had qualified for Chapter 1 in both reading and math at the beginning of the year, but she kept him in his home room for Book Club. He frequently mentioned how much he hated reading, noting this fact in a preliminary questionnaire, in a midpoint survey, and during all interviews.

Bart is a child of mixed ethnicity--his mother is of half-Japanese and half-European descent while his father is African American. Bart had good verbal skills, was of average intelligence, and seemed to want to do well in school. During class, he frequently participated in discussions and

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[2]Students selected their own pseudonyms.

began assignments immediately. He once told his group that reading was important for learning. He also reported reading at home.

Procedure

Data collection and analysis for descriptive work merge together into one, ongoing process. The researcher must begin early the process by systematically searching through all the possible documentation to determine which data is relevant and to catalogue materials based on emerging patterns and themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). To understand student participation in the reading program, I collected multiple sources of data, including: (a) field notes, (b) audiotaped lessons, (c) audiotaped Book Club meetings, (d) formal and informal interviews of the students, and (e) student documents. All tapes were professionally transcribed, but I edited them.

Observing and recording field notes. I observed reading two to three times a week throughout the unit focusing on Japan. During these observations, I took field notes, directing most of my attention to the responses and behaviors of the students reported in this study. After observing the class, I expanded my notes by listening to the audiotapes of the instruction, Community Share, and Book Club meetings before sending them to a professional transcriber. I also added impressions or noted patterns I saw emerging in student behavior and interactions. As I identified recurring patterns, I noted this for future observations and subsequent analysis.

Recording the participants' words. To capture the participants' words, I taped the instructional component, Community Share, and student Book Club meetings. Repeated listening to the tapes resulted in my identification of the topics or themes students in the group wanted to discuss--an essential characteristic of the talk I wanted to capture since these topics and themes appeared to influence which ideas remained on the conversational floor the longest. To attempt to communicate the actual interactional patterns during these discussions, I identified six key aspects of the conversations I wanted to note on the transcripts: (a) interruptions in a speaker's turn, (b) overlapping talk, (c) stressed words or phrases, (d) pauses within a speaker's turn as well as between turns, (e) speaker's tone, and (f) time elapsed (see Appendix). Each of these seemed

important when trying to understand the interactions of the group. Others familiar with sociolinguistic analysis listened to one of the tapes while reading the transcript to verify the notations.

Student interviews. To gain some sense of student perceptions of reading and group interactions I frequently talked with the target group during class as I circulated. I included student answers and/or my impressions of what they were writing in my field notes.

In addition, I scheduled four formal interviews with each of the case study students. As I continued to reread their logs and transcripts of Book Club meetings. I decided to attempt to achieve what Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) called "respondent validation" about what they had written in their logs and what they had said during Book Club. I brought all the data I had collected on each student for the interview: (a) edited transcripts of Book Club meetings, (b) reading logs, and (c) think-sheets.

Before the interview, I had marked particular responses or representations that I wanted to discuss. I began each interview asking background questions. Then, as the student looked through the notebook, I proceeded to ask questions specific to each child's data and in response to their answers. I took notes and taped these interviews.

Finding patterns and themes after data collection. I completed analysis by searching through individual student data, identifying categories of topics students either wrote about in their logs or brought up during the discussion. These included (a) views of war, (b) concern for the personal events in the characters' lives, and (c) questions about cultural differences. These categories provided opportunities to examine the data closely, focusing on its key aspects.

As I continued analysis, searching for patterns by examining each student's ideas as evidenced through representations, in written log entries, and during Book Club meetings, I examined transcripts to see how particular themes or topics continued to emerge. I found that similar themes and/or topics surfaced across individual student's log entries, in their Book Club discussions, in synthesis activities, and throughout discussions.

Emergent Topics and Themes

Students' interest in three major themes emerged through their log entries and oral discussions in Book Club: (a) the effects of weapons on people, (b) the events in the lives of the main character(s) with which they could identify, and (c) the cultural differences between them and the characters. While all three of these were evident initially, the interest in cultural differences seemed to wane while the first two merged together as children continued to read the three books with similar themes. This section explores the development of each of these.

Cultural Differences

Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes (Coerr, 1977) presents contemporary American children with examples of several cultural differences between themselves and Japanese children of the same age. In addition, the book is set in Japan in the 1950s so there is a time difference as well. Because Japanese folklore is central to this book, their customs and beliefs emerge early. Three images presented early in the book led many of the group members to write entries and present topics of conversation regarding these beliefs.

First was the Japanese folklore that the gods granted wishes to anyone who made 1,000 paper cranes. All five students noted this early in the reading. Bart wrote, " [What] I want to look for in the story is if she makes a thousand paper cranes."[3] Martisse in particular appeared drawn by the belief. In one of her entries she wrote, "...if she makes a thousand paper cranes the Gods will grant you a wish and will live happey ever after." Despite very early references to this, however, students rarely referred to it later in their reading.

Second was a reference in chapter one about spiders bringing good luck. This notion caught Bart's interest since he wrote about it in his log and brought it up for discussion. In his log, he noted he wanted to share the following quote from the book with his Book Club, "a spider

[3]All log entries are presented just as the students wrote them, including misspellings and errors in capitalization and punctuation. Occasionally, words are added where they help to clarify an entry.

is a good luck sighn said Sadako oh thats silly said Masahiro spiders dont bring good luck. Just wiat and see said Sadako." He included the following reason,

> Because I would like to see if it worked or knot because on the rug a spider walked passed my path so I would like to see if it worked sometimes I believe that if a black cat walked pass your path you have bad luck. and if kill a spider it will rain

During the instructional component that day, a spider did indeed walk past Bart while the class sat on the rug in literacy corner. While several boys were interested in the spider, the teacher told them to leave it alone. All but Bart did as the teacher suggested and directed their attention to her. In contrast, Bart continued to play with the spider and eventually picked it up and took it to the window.

Early in the Book Club discussion, Bart introduced this superstitious belief as a question to his group.

Bart:	Why, um, why is // why is the spider good luck if it walks past you, past your path? // Anybody? //
Chris:	Well,
Bart:	Anybody know?
Martisse:	Maybe they just use that...
Chris:	Yeah, as an excuse in the book.
Bart:	(Answering his own question.) Or maybe that happened to someone in and something good happened the same day so they said that. (Seems to be agreeing with Martisse and Chris.) (Book Club Transcript, October 2, 1990)

Bart introduced his topic in the form of a question that none of the group members seem prepared to answer. Of course, this is an unanswerable question. Most superstition is grounded in belief that cannot be explained. As Martisse and Chris seemed willing to dismiss this as a device in the book, Bart attempted to answer his own question with a theory that is probably close to the origin of the belief; that is, "something good happened the same day" people remembered a spider crossing their path. He may also be demonstrating his own wish that something good will happen

to him as a result of the spider walking past him earlier. Despite an apparent lack of interest among his group, Bart seemd eager to continue the discussion by reintroducing the topic again a few moments later.

Bart: I would like to see if a spider walked past my path was on the rug, the spider walked past my path and I tried to pick it up and I picked it up and dropped it / I let it outside and I wanted to see if it's really good luck...that's why I put it down. (Book Club Transcript, October 2, 1990)

In this second section, Bart revealed to his group part of the reason for his interest in this topic was the spider on the carpet during instruction. His comments revealed his curiosity about whether he would be the recipient of good luck. As before, however, Bart is the only group member who seemed interested in this superstition. After several minutes of discussion on other topics, Bart again brought up superstitious belief, this time with more success.

Bart: The other idea is I would like to talk about Book Club. It's at the bottom page. (Hitting his desk.) You know, sometimes I will read if a black cat walks past your path you get [bad luck.

Chris: [Bad luck.

Bart: And if [you squish a....

Chris: [And you should go the other way.

Lissa : [Not true because I have a black cat.

Bart: [Yup. And, and if you squish a spider it will rain. (Makes his voice go high and sing-song like.)

Lissa : It will not rain because I squished a spider and it didn't rain the next day. (Makes voice like Bart's.)

Martisse: I know. It didn't even rain that day. That's just a [superstition.

Chris: [Superstition

Lissa : Well, it rained the day before.

Martisse: Even if you had a black cat cross your path...

Chris: No.

Bart: I had bad luck when that happened once, I swear.

Chris: They do say black cats are bad luck.

Martisse: They're not.

Lissa : They aren't, 'cause I [have a black.

Bart: [We're not supposed to be arguing. We're supposed to be saying stuff on the thing. (Sounds angry or frustrated.) (Book Club Transcript, October 2, 1990)

Perhaps Bart hoped to elicit the group's support for the belief that black cats are bad luck so that he might convince them that he will have good luck for letting the spider go; however, the group did not support either superstition. Martisse and Lissa debated the belief that black cats bring bad luck, calling on their own personal experience with cats to refute the notion. Chris balanced his own ideas between the girls' position and Bart's. Finally, Bart dismissed the topic, stating they should not be arguing. This ended any further discussion about this superstitious belief, but Bart included it again in a subsequent log entry. He wrote, "when she was sitting down a spider walked past her and she said it was good luck."

A second cultural difference in which the students appeared to be interested was the custom of sending candles down the river to commemorate those who died during the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In Lissa's first log entry she noted she wanted to discuss the lanterns on the river. In his log entries, Chris questioned the practice, indicating perhaps his own lack of comprehension of the text. While reading the early chapters of the book, Chris wrote, "Whe did thay sind candel down the river." In the next entry, but before the group had discussed the event, he again wrote, "I want to know whey they sent candels down the river." In addition, Mondo wrote in his log that he wanted to talk about "when the let the candles in the water of there grana [grandmother] because that will be nice to do that for there grana."

Student interest in this custom sparked a Book Club discussion in which many group members contributed to the construction of the practice. Lissa introduced the topic, but other group members contributed to the discussion.

Lissa: Uhm, I think its neat that they put the lan, the paper lanterns in the water.

Bart: That, yeah I forgot to tell [you...

Chris: [Oh, yeah.]

Bart: [...they put paper lanterns in the water [that's for their grave.

Mondo: [For their grandma.

Bart: Their grave, because on Karate Kid, [the,

Mondo: [Yeah, they done it]

Bart: [the Japanese

Mondo: [They done it,

Bart: and they did that too in the water *Karate Kid Part 3*.

Mondo: Yea, but they done it around the [circle.

Chris: [a circle.

Mondo: They did it in the ocean.

Bart: A river.

Mondo: A river.

Chris: Yea and they made,...and they were like candles.

Martisse: Yea

During this section of the conversation, several children contributed what they knew about the custom, much of which came from the movie *The Karate Kid, Part Three*. What is interesting to note here is that Chris seemed to understand the practice since he contributed to the conversation; however, he always responded at the same time as another speaker and with the same comment. His final critique of the book indicated he still did not understand the custom. In the section in which he discussed what he thought the author could improve, he wrote the same question, "Whey did they sind candle down the river" indicating that perhaps he still did not understand the purpose for the ceremony but was reluctant to indicate this in his Book Club. At the same time, many members of the group had contributed to a description of the ceremony.

While students noted these cultural differences early in their log entries and during discussions, they became less interested in them as they progressed through the novel. Their third log entries, completed before reading the third and fourth chapters, were the last ones to note any cultural differences. Perhaps because the other two themes seemed to become more important.

The Weapons of War

From the very first day, many of the students expressed an interest in the weapons of war. Bart, Mondo, and Chris drew representations of a carnival being bombed. In Bart's drawing several faceless people fall silently to their deaths as continuous bombs hit a carnival (see Figure 1). Much like Bart's drawing, Chris's illustrates a plane bombing a town (see Figure 1). The stick figures show little effects from the bombing. Interestingly Mondo's drawing, which began as a drawing of the family praying for their grandmother, included a plane bombing a carnival with a roller coaster like Bart's (see Figure 2). All three boys' drawings demonstrate an interest in planes and bombs but also a lack of attention to the suffering attributed to war.

When they discussed this topic during Book Club, this same emphasis on bombs surfaced, while human suffering emerged in their talk, it did so with a humorous tone. Bart introduced this topic as the initial one the group discussed the first time they met.

Bart: I drew um, that um, airplane dropping a bomb on that fair. And there's dead people laying on the ground (He laughs) /// and um it it it exploded, and gas is killing them, they're all falling on the ground // and their eyes are popped out, an' they're, an' they're, and they're dead. And they fell off the roller coaster,

(Chris laughs)

Bart: Splattered (Bart laughs).

By introducing this as he did, Bart began the discussion of the book in general and war in particular in a humorous way. When interviewed later, Chris, Martisse and Lissa, all noted that it was the way Bart shared his drawing that made them think this topic was funny. Chris continued the discussion on the same topic and following the same tone.

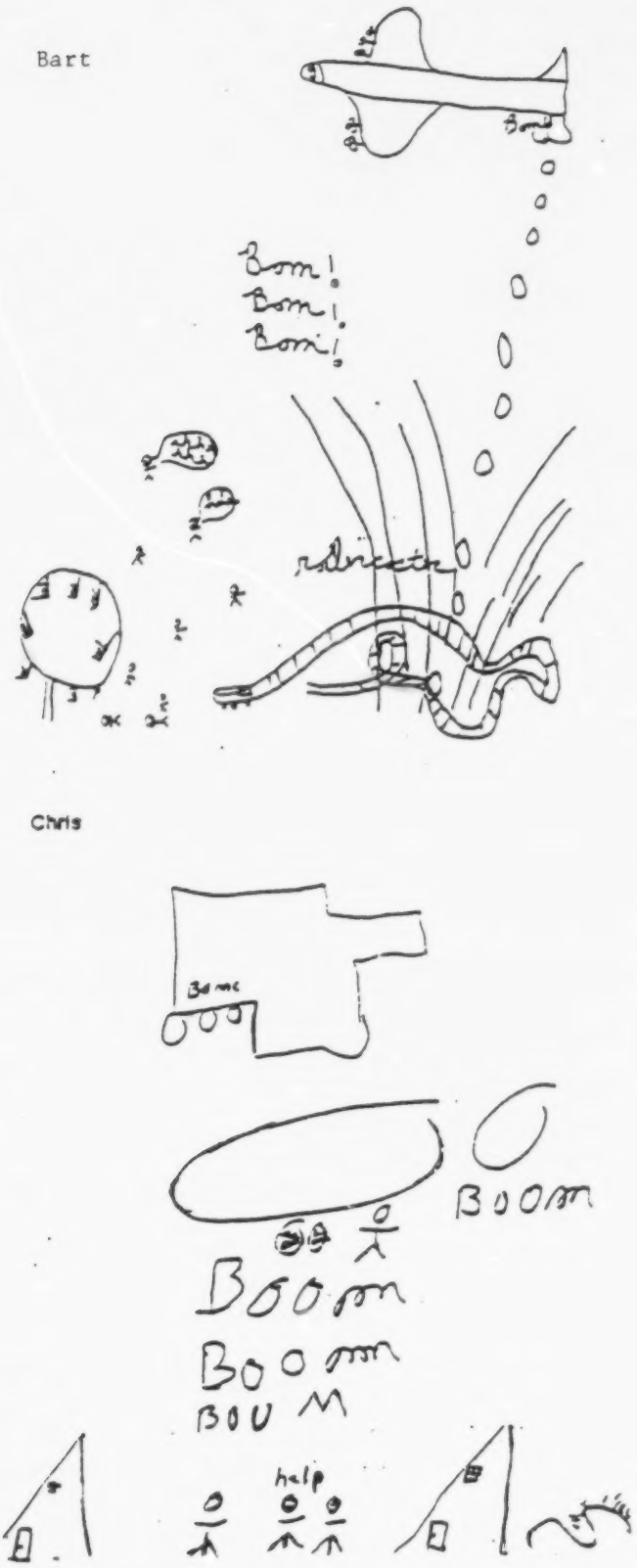

Figure 1. Students' representations of the bombing of Hiroshima.

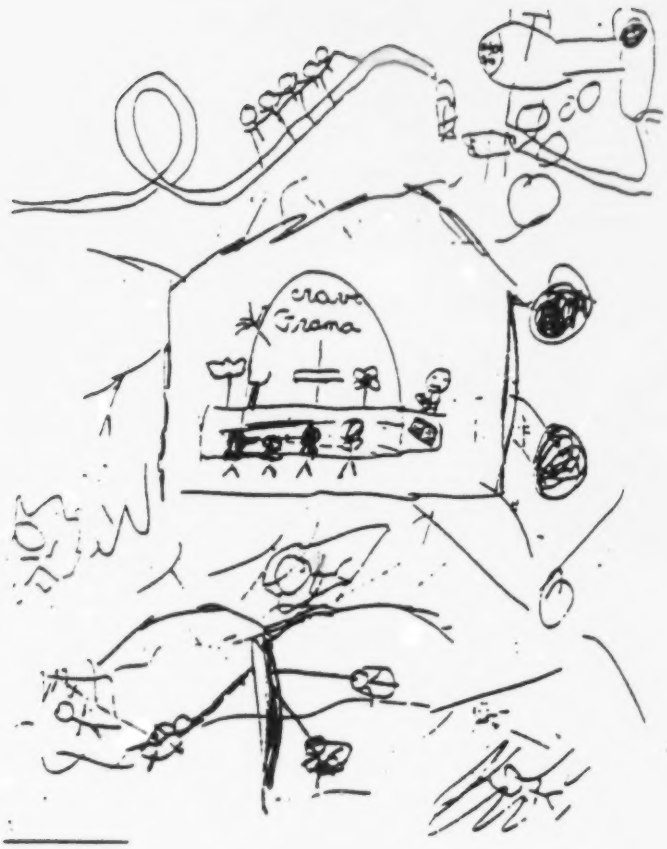

Figure 2. Mondo's representation of the family praying and the bombing of Hiroshima.

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Chris: I drew the story of the bomb, bomb, falling on the fair. (Laughing) Boom! Boom!

(Bart laughs)

Chris: And people said, "Heeelp! Heeeelp!"

Bart: I'm dying! The gas is getting to me!

(Chris laughs)

Chris: And they trying to run to their houses saying, "Help! Help! Let me in." And their brains poppin' out their heads. (Book Club Transcript, October 1, 1990)

Bart joined Chris in his explanation of his drawing, laughing and building the sense that this is a humorous topic.

Mondo's contribution, occurring much later, illustrated his interest in the war as well as how the war had affected Sadako's family.

Mondo: I drew a picture (nervous laugh) the bomb came down, and when they came and started praying to their uhm grandma...An a helicopter (Laughter in group and by Mondo) blew a bomb that smelled and all that junk...when they were praying.... (Book Club transcript, October 1, 1990)

Mondo's contribution seemed hesitant. He tried to include both aspects of his drawing: the war and the effects on the family. However, this did not foster any further discussion. Immediately after he added the above statement, the teacher reminded the group they could discuss their predictions as well, so they focused its attention on these.

The next day, when the group met again, the topic of bombs emerged again. In their logs, both Lissa and Chris made references to the bombing. In response to the prompt "Section from the book that I would like to read to my Book Club group," Lissa simply wrote, "the thunderbolt." In response to the same prompt, Chris wrote, "When the Boom drop on masues [masses]." When Book Club met, students attempted to co-construct what happened when an atomic bombed exploded. Lissa introduced the topic by asking why the bomb was called a thunderbolt, beginning a long interaction where students co-construct what happened when the bomb dropped.

Lissa: But why did they call the bomb a thunderbolt?

Mondo: 'Cause what if a thunderbolt hit, 'cause when it lands]

Bart: [Listen up.

Mondo: [it makes some [thunder.

Bart: [I'm talking. 'Cause lightening has, // rit, lightening is very high in electricity and so is a bomb.

Lissa: And it's like, it's like]

Bart: [And they're both just]

Lissa: [It's faster than the speed of light.]

Mondo: [No, not that fast. (laughing)

Bart: [thunder, more than a million times.

Lissa: It makes a, it makes a, it makes a mushroom-shaped cloud.

Bart: Right.

Lissa: That's what happened. I saw it in the book the same story (hitting the desk),

Bart: [Yep

Lissa: [I saw it in my book and it it made a [mushroom-shaped cloud...

Bart: [Mushroom-shaped like, like

Lissa: ...and it killed almost every one around.

Bart: Yup like that. (Moving his hands up, illustrating an explosion.)

Lissa: No it goes like this. It goes shh... (Moving her hands higher in the air and tracing the form of a mushroom.)

Bart: Yea that's what I did I went like... (Moving his hands like before except in a more exaggerated way.)

Chris: When the bomb hit poof!

Bart: The bomb could travel. The gas could travel up, 'cause when the wind, 'cause when the gas is in the air the wind blows it and it goes to country, to

country, to country and they all die. (Book Club Transcript, October 2, 1990)

As they interacted, each child contributed what she or he knew about bombs in general and the atomic bomb in particular. While Lissa seemed to know the most, the majority of the group members contributed to an explanation for what happened when an atom bomb exploded and why people equated the it to a thunderbolt. This interaction caused Mondo to confront Bart about his humorous accounting of the bombing the previous day.

Mondo: But I don't think that's funny what you said yesterday.

Bart: What?

Mondo: When the people who where blowing blown off the roller coaster.

Bart: [But they [were,

Mondo: [That's not [funny.

Bart: [but they were falling off the roller coaster. Where else would they be? Still riding it and having fun when the bomb hit it?
/

Mondo: That's still bogue. (Book Club Transcript, October 2, 1990)

When Mondo challenged Bart's drawing and explanation of the previous day, Bart appeared to defend his description but without the humor. He argued that people would fall off rides at a carnival and that this was his main point. Such a serious interaction about the effects of the bomb appeared to counteract the humor of the previous discussion. This brief interaction appeared to signal a shift in student sentiment about war and bombs. Log entries also illustrated this shift.

In subsequent logs, Lissa, Martisse, Mondo, and Chris all focused on Sadako and her family. In contrast, Bart demonstrated a continued interest in the effects of bombs for a slightly longer period. He wrote, "I want to know... more [about] when they droped the bomb how many people died I want to know if she is going to get that disease and die." However, after reading about the beginning of Sadako's illness, he, too, demonstrated a change in his thinking. He wrote

about Sadako's getting chosen for the relay team "because if something good heppend I would want to write it down I don't want to write down all bad things that happend in the story when she got picked for the relay team so did I only on field day I was happy to I won It I got a blue ribbon." Reading about Sadako's illness initiated Bart's interest in Sadako and her plight. However, his interest in the bomb continued. Even though his subsequent log entries continued to focus on Sadako, in his critique of the book he stated, "They should start earlier and talk about the bomb" thus showing an ongoing interest in the bombings.

In general, students maintained some level of interest in the war throughout the reading of the other two books, but with a slightly altered perspective of how the war affected the characters. Before considering this, it is important to examine how the students wrote about, represented, and discussed the characters early in the book. The next section explores this.

The Events in the Characters Lives

The topic which received the most space in students' logs and during discussions was the events in the characters' lives with which students identified. Not surprisingly, when asked to predict what *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes* would be about, all the students assumed Sadako was the same gender as they were and most connected the main character with the bird on the cover (see Table 1). That they predicted events from the cover is not surprising either since this was the only knowledge they had about the book. However, as they read,their interest in Sadako, her family and friends continued.

The student showing the most consistent interest in the events in Sadako's life was Martisse. All of her log entries, both written and drawn, focused on what Sadako did and how Martisse identified with her. Further, she initiated her own contributions to Book Clubs with references to these events. For example, for the first Book Club meeting, immediately after Bart and Chris had shared their own humorous accounts of the bombing of a carnival, Martisse elected to talk about an interaction between Sadako and her mother which she had also drawn (see Figure 3).

TABLE 1

ORIGINAL AND REVISED PREDICTIONS BEFORE READING SADAKO

Original Predictions

MARTISSE: It will be about Sadako making paper cranes that she likes and will probly will end up good or bad Sadako must be Japanese or Chinede by her name I like Chinese and Japanese because they are nice

CHRIS: sakdo is going is going to make a lot of planes and Sakdo is proley poor and he is on his on without a mother and a father

LISSA: sadako is a little girl she is chinese and she kows how to make paper krans and and she made a thosand paper krans and she holds one up one day and says I wish you could and then it turns real!

MONDO: I going about browing a baid that he promble and someone shise to kill it. but the little boy won't let hen go and he get hem and takes hem to jell. or he likes bird and try to braw the bird and make's them.

BART: I might be about he going somewere like a pond and he saw that bird sadoco and he got attached to them or maybe he had a bird and then he probably started makeing them our of papper maybe he made six a day enteil he got to a thousand birds thats why they call the story that name

Revised Predictions

MARTISSE: She will have good luck at the fair and she will get to ride a lot of rides and that might be where she gets the ideal of making paper cranes.

CHRIS: skado grandmother spart will come back and the air will will get clean and people will stop dieing and the will live happy amp popeople wham die.

LISSA: I think that it will be a very good book but sad at parts because the grand ma died and I think that the girl dies in the Story.

MONDO: the real story she's was going to a place ware peopel dead of a bom and everone diad but her grana diad in the bomm thay went to pray for her grana.

BART: he could be going to the pong and see that bird and that bird could be a spiret of his grandma or grandpa one of the two.

Figure 3. Martisse's representation of the argument between Sadako and her mother.

> About the story I have, (Reading her log in a serious voice) her ma she said um she ran out in the street and she said, "I'm going to this carnival." And then her ma said /// She said, "I like the carnival (Undecipherable. Something about running.) Her ma said, "You'll be um sad like that and it's not a carnival. It's a memorable day and so many people uhm, your grandma died in that bomb because the gas.....comes out and you get leukemia and some people still got leukemia now. .. And uhm, uhm, she said, "I like the carnival." Her mom said, "You don't wanna be talking like that because your grandma died in that bomb with leukemia." (Book Club Transcript, October 1, 1990)

Martisse began her turn by reading her log entry. Her selection of text to share indicated that she was interested in an interaction between Sadako and her mother. Her topic, however, did not instill any discussion within the group. When she finished reading her log, the group moved on to another topic.

Despite the group's apparent lack of interest in what Martisse chose to introduce during this Book Club meeting, she continued to write and draw events in Sadako's life. In fact, all of the children chose to write about events in Sadako's life in subsequent log entries although to a lesser degree than Martisse did and particularly when events in the book coincided with those in their own lives. For example, Bart wrote that he wanted to share sections about the race because he could identify with Sadako's getting selected for the race:

> ...when she got picked for the relay team so did I only on field day I was happy to I won It I got a blue ribbon

Interestingly, Martisse selected the very same section of the book to share in Book Club for similar reasons, "because I like running last year I won in the relay race my whole team was Krystal, Stellar, Desire and Me and we won."

In addition, the children became interested in Sadako's efforts to fight leukemia and to live. Log entries included drawn representations of her stay in the hospital (see Figure 4) and her death (see Figure 5). Their comments demonstrated their own confusion and interest in a person close to their ages confronting death. Their ideas ranged from sincere concern to belief in the magic of the folk lore. Chris questioned her impending death with, "Whey she goin to die." Bart indicated he wanted to talk about Sadako's growing weakness in Book Club "because I wanted to know

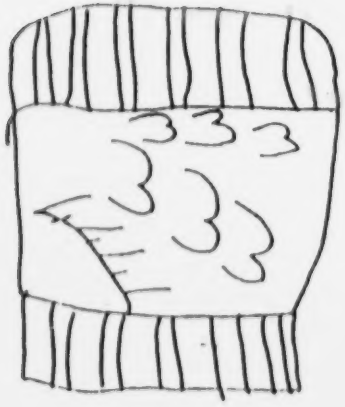
Marlisse

Lissa

Figure 4. Students' representations of Sadako in the hospital.

Marlisse

Lissa



Bari

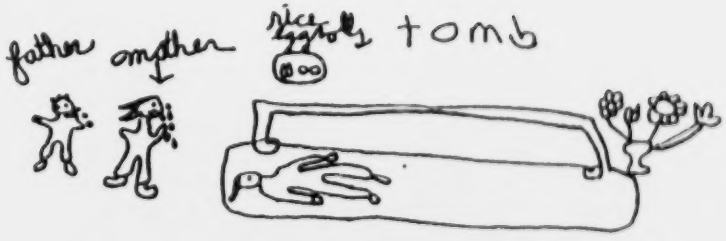


Figure 5. Students' representations of Sadako's death and fureral.

what it's like dying I always wondered if dying hurted but it is like falling asleep slowly." In contrast, Martisse wanted to believe in the myth of the cranes. She wrote, "I know that she will get sick off the ratiations [radiation] and she was sopost to die but if she makes a thousand paper cranes the Gods will grant you a wish and will live happey ever after." When she discovered Sadako would succumb to the illness, she wrote, "it is sad. She realy didn't get to live a full life."

After the class had finished reading *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes*, each student, under the direction of the teacher, wrote a critique of the book, including elements they thought the author had accomplished successfully and those she could have improved. Students could select to narrow their topic to either the plot, the setting, or the characterization. Mondo was absent and did not compete the book critique, however, the other four members of this group selected character development as their focus. These critiques ranged from summary of the major characters in the book to requests for more information about minor characters.

Martisse chose to summarize the characters and provide her own evaluation.

> This is the story Sadako and thousand paper cranes. It is written by Eleanor Coerr. I am going to tell you about the charactors in the story. The characters are Sadako, Masahiro, Eizi and Mr and Mrs Saski, and Sadako's best friend Chizuko. This is a good book!
> She had good name for the sisters and brothers and the rest of them too. The most impoerant thing was they had a mom and a dad. The charactors were important they acted out good and I liked [it].

Both Bart and Chris requested further information about male characters in the book. Bart wrote, "they could put the brother in the story more" and Chris recorded, "I whant to know if the mother is going to die and whey don't they talk about the father." Lissa's critique had the most specific references to the characterization of Sadako. She wrote,

> Hear are some of things that the author did well. She told us about Sadako's eyes tinkled when she was a baby when the bomb droped. The auther handled her death smoothly ...Hear are some of the things the auther could improve on. She could have put some of the dizyness when she was at the peace park befoe she was in the hospital.

As their log entries indicated, the children devoted significant space to writing about Sadako and the other characters in the book. In contrast, these ideas did not receive much time

during discussions. Whenever students read entries associated with the characters, they read them with little group interaction. Unlike conversations about the cultural differences or the effects of the war, conversations never revolved around events in the character's lives.

After reading *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes*, the class read two additional books set in Japan during World War II: *Hiroshima No Pika* (Maruki, 1982) and *Faithful Elephants* (Yukio, 1988). These are two picture books that the teacher decided to read aloud to the children in one sitting then make copies available to groups for rereading and discussion. Therefore, the reading periods were similar for each book and the children completed their reading, writing, and discussions of the books within a four-day period. The teacher introduced each book by showing students the cover and reading the title. She then asked them to write in their logs what they thought the story would be about. Next she gathered the class on the floor in a circle around her chair and read them the story without interruption. After she had read the book, she directed students to return to their desks and write what they were feeling. Then Book Clubs met to discuss their predictions and feelings. Finally, the whole class shared major points introduced in Book Clubs. After completing the reading, writing, and discussion of these two books, the teacher asked the students to write a paper synthesizing their ideas from the three books. During this period of approximately two weeks in which they read, wrote, and discussed these books and revisited *Sadako*, two of the topics they had been reading about, writing about, and discussing merged together into two major themes.

Themes Merging Together as Students Continued to Read

Martisse was absent when the class began *Hiroshima No Pika* so her predictions are not available. Not surprisingly though, the other four children all predicted that this book would tell more about the bombing of Hiroshima (see Table 2). After hearing the story, children were clearly emotionally affected and questioned the reasons for the bombing. For example, Chris's entry included elements found in the other students' entries. "But way did they droped the boom they did not do eanything to the us [U. S.] that was not fair and I felt sad"

TABLE 2

ORIGINAL AND REVISED PREDICTIONS FOR *HIROSHIMA, NO PIKA*

Original predictions

MONDO: It will promble be about the bom and win she Deis and About the paper cran And the posin that got in to her And when she went to the hospitel

BART: it Might be about a bomb and some of her family dies like the mother or father and she makes things out of paper and makeing a wish and she might die from a diesease and people start making things for her when she is in the hospital and her hole family might die

LISSA: the story is going to be about the bomb that struck Hiroshima a long time ago and about all the people that dies in it and about how many people died then and what the amercans felt like then

CHRIS: It will be about the attom boom and it will show when the people are dieing and the Book will show the plane that droped the Boom and it will show a big big furnal and it will show how it bloom up the peace and they will pray to all the flams and there people and the americans felt bad after they droped the boom

Revised Predictions

MONDO: I feel sorry for the little girl. And her dad and Mon And her friends I wood pronble be scard of the bon to if I was her

BART: The book is a very sad one. I feel sorry for all the people who died I would knot be able to talk about the bomb if it happend to me

LISSA: I feel very different from the story of sadako

CHRIS: it was kind of sad But way did they droped the boom they did not do eanything to the us that was not fair and I felt sad

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TABLE 3

ORIGINAL AND REVISED PREDICTIONS FOR *FAITHFUL ELEPHANTS*

Original predictions[1]

MONDO: I think it's prombabe it go to be About the War ware peopl get killed. And ware Elephants come to the war in one of the time. And thay to kill the people for they can win the war for thay can get to win.

BART: It might be about people use ing animals to fight in war or it could be about using animals weapons like elephants tucks, training them how to use animals weapons to kill shoulders in the war.

LISSA: I think that it is going to be about awar and the Elefants are going to fight with the people.

CHRIS: it is going to be about men killing elefligant and they are going to be people that care for them and if they are goging to crie and they are going to fill Bad and the war men are going to kill.

Revised Predictions

MONDO: I feell sorry for the janpan and the animals and the Elanphants.

BART: This story was more sad than the one Yesterday if I had elephants I would feed them every day so they would not starve.

LISSA: I fell very sad about this story.

CHRIS: I fell sad they did not have to kill them and they could have stop the war they were doing thing (nothing).

---

[1]Martisse was absent from school this day, so her prediction and revision was not available.

Before reading *Faithful Elephants*, student predictions demonstrated they were making connections across the books (see Table 3). They noted that the story would be about war killing people. Only Chris however, predicted that the elephants would be hurt by the war. He wrote, "it is going to be about men killing elefligant and they are going to be people that care for them and if they are goging to crie and they are going to fill Bad and the war men are going to kill."

After the teacher read this book, the class wrote their feelings and/or ideas in their logs. Their entries revealed that the children were indeed saddened by the events portrayed in the book. Mondo's entry captures this best. "I feell sorry for the janpan and the animals and the Elamphants." Therefore, as this entry illustrates, students seemed to be empathizing with the plight of the Japanese during World War II as they realized war hurt and killed people, including children, and animals. Their thinking had progressed beyond the scope of the books to the dilemmas associated with war.

In their Book Club meeting after *Faithful Elephants* and when they came together a week later to discuss their synthesis papers, transcripts of their Book Clubs revealed the complexity of their thinking. The students identified two crucial elements of war that they seemed to understand after reading all three of these books: (a) war forces people to make difficult choices and (b) it causes many innocents to suffer. (The fact that these conversations occurred on the eve of the War in the Gulf is relevant. While this class did not specifically discuss the impending war as part of Book Club, they did talk about it during Social Studies. Further, daily news coverage debated issues surrounding war. This larger context of national importance might have influenced what students wrote and discussed.)

The Difficult Choices People Need to Make

The first issue students discussed regarded the difficult choices people must make during war. The discussion illustrating this revolved around the immediate problem the zookeepers in *Faithful Elephants* confronted--how to manage the possibility that bombs could destroy the cages

and turn dangerous animals loose. This transcript begins as Lissa sided with the zookeepers, but Mondo and Bart argued that they must have had other, more humane choices.

Lissa: But they couldn't kill the people...

Chris: And those dumb folks up in the air coulda stopped that war. Why do they always drop it on the people that know they can't do anything back.

//

Bart: They shouldn't 'a' put 'em (the elephants) through misery like that. If they really did wanna kill 'em, they shoulda just did it fast, 'cuz they made 'em suffer. And it rea, and it really hurt 'em, I guess.

Mondo: They should just...

Bart: And I wouldn't like it. And if that happened to them, I betcha they wouldn't like it at all; they would be beggin'.

Mondo: They shoulda just shoot, shot 'em with the elephant gun.

Chris: They tried to.

Mondo: No, but...

Chris: They broke the middle.

Mondo: No, but a gun.

Bart: An elephant gun, and shoot 'em.

Mondo: About, the bullet's about that big. (Book Club Transcript, October 23, 1990)

During this discussion, students tried to create new answers to the dilemma of what to do with potentially dangerous zoo animals in a city that might be bombed any day. Lissa began by illustrating that they could not risk people's lives. Bart and Mondo did not explicitly agree, but they did explore alternative methods for destroying the animals. Mondo proposed a logical question that no one could answer, "Why didn't the zookeepers shoot the elephants?" As this section of transcript illustrates, the children were wrestling with the difficult decisions some people did indeed have to confront during World War II. This continued as they thought more about the books they had read.

After having time to reflect on their synthesis papers, the students continued to discuss difficult choices, but this time their topic surrounded larger issues, namely when and how to decide whether to begin fighting. Bart and Lissa sided together as pacifists who would never decide to go to war. Chris argued that revenge is sufficient motive for war. Both Martisse and Mondo remained relatively quiet until later, when they sided with Chris.

1	Bart:	I wrote about survival too //// and I wrote about Japanese. I was speaking about Japanese people and their culture. That's what I was really thinking about. But I wrote...
2	Chris:	(unclear Chris talking but too softly)
3	Bart:	I know, I know but I was thinking, if you can't bomb Americans,
4	Chris:	It's war. They bombed us and we bombed 'em back.
5	Bart:	I know, but still.
6	Chris:	(Says something, the tape doesn't pick up.)
7	Lissa:	Yeah, / but the Americans had the the war.
8	Bart:	Yeah, but if Japan bombs uhm a part that's not uhm, if Japan this part we don't have the right to go back and bomb them. Two wrongs don't make a right.
9	Chris:	Japan bombed Pearl Harbor.
10	Bart:	I know, but still,
11	Chris:	Americans had to go bomb them back.
12	Bart:	It doesn't make sense to go back and bomb them. That's like President Bush //
13	Child:	(Someone outside the group says something to Bart, but the tape doesn't pick it up.)
14	Bart:	(As if to someone outside the group) Wait. (Then as if to the group) I know. He gets a mistake, like really uhm / if they if they make a move on us, we have a war. Two wrongs don't make a right. That's wrong. / I would saying / run me over, if they do something...
//		
15	Martisse:	Bomb them back.

16	Lissa:	No!
17	Bart:	No! Just leave, leave it. [Just leave.
18	Lissa:	[Let it be.
19	Bart:	If they keep on doing it we'll have to do somethin' about it.
20	Mondo:	Well, they're just killin' our guys.
21	Bart:	What about these American people there too huh? There are American people there. So if we bomb em...
22	Martisse:	Bomb yourself.
23	Bart:	I'll do it. He might let go. And let him take over 'cause it's got nothing to do with us. (Book Club Transcript, October 29, 1990)

In the above section, these fifth graders debated issues national leaders wrestle with. Bart brought the survival of a culture to the forefront, maintaining the cost was too great. In contrast, Chris adopted a more nationalistic stance, arguing a country must seek revenge when attacked. The debate was emotional and fast-paced as students contributed ideas. Even a friend's attempt to divert Bart (lines 13 & 14) failed as he endeavored to make his point. That these children could not resolve these issues was not unusual; that they were debating them is. They had read the same books and participated in the same written and oral activities, yet they adopted their own positions. It is unclear how much the impending Gulf War influenced students' thinking during the debate. When Bart (line 12) mentioned President Bush, the children then changed their verb tenses to present tense. For example, Bart said (line 19) "If they keep on doing it" and Mondo responded, "Well, they're just killin' our guys" [emphasis added]. This rapid shift might indicate the children had started discussing the Gulf War, not World War II. This seemed particularly to be the case given Bart's last comment, "And let him take over 'cause it's got nothing to do with us" which might be a reference to Saddam Hussien's invasion of Kuwait.

Both of these transcripts demonstrate the children's increased interest in and knowledge about the difficult decisions associated with war. Their thinking has clearly progressed from that

represented in their earlier discussion about the bombing of the carnival. In addition to this theme, they also had developed a second, equally important one dealing with the suffering of innocents in wartime.

The Suffering of the Innocent

A second and perhaps more prevalent theme these students pursued within the later Book Club discussions and the final synthesis paper related to the suffering of the innocent. In the following section, Chris lamented that the animals may have had to be destroyed, but they did not have to suffer.

Chris: Either way they go, they were gonna die, but they didn't have to make them suffer.

Mondo: Well, they co, they couldn't, 'cuz they, They coulda lived.

Chris: Either way, they're gonna die. If they woulda lived longer, they were gonna die from radiation sickness.

Mondo: But there wasn't, They didn't drop a...

Bart: (The first part of his statement cannot be heard) radiation, 'cuz that wasn't the bomb. It was regular old bombs they dropped.

Mondo: But they coulda left them to destroy. They coulda...

Bart: They were close; they coulda got radiation.

Mondo: They could have.

Chris: Or they could've got burnt to death.

Bart: Yeah. Just like the chemical. (Book Club Transcript, October 23, 1990)

Chris revealed that the elephants were probably going to die in the war anyway so the group need not debate their death, but the animals should not have had to suffer. He based his argument on his assumption that Tokyo, the setting for this story, would either be bombed with atomic weapons as Hiroshima was or be affected by radiation. While Bart and Mondo attempted to clarify that Tokyo was bombed with conventional weapons, they still agreed that the elephants and other animals would have suffered if the zoo had been bombed.

Later in the same conversation, Bart reported his concern that the elephants did not deserve to die because they were innocent.

Bart: I, the topic I wanna share about is the elephants getting no food. The elephants were innocent. They didn't do one thing. The elephants, they didn't do one thing. They were innocent. If the zookeepers loved them so much, why'd they have to put them to sleep?

Lissa: Yeah, but.

Bart: Why?

Lissa: Uhm, they said the two elephants were cute. How come they had to kill 'em?

////

Bart: The bomb didn't even hit.

Mondo: The war was going to be over.

Bart: The war is over now, right?

Martisse: They coulda took the elephants...

Bart: The elephants could have been alive right?

Lissa: Yeah.

Bart: They they could've been happy. And I betchu, I betchu that bomb didn't hit, I betchu that bomb didn't even hit that zoo.

Lissa: There was a whole bunch of little bombs, [you know.

Mondo: [They, they coulda [put

Lissa: [How come Hiroshima had to get them big ole bombs and then, uhm, Tokyo had those little ones? (Book Club Transcript, October 23, 1990)

Bart initiated this segment of the conversation expressing his concern that the elephants were innocent. Lissa appeared to want to disagree and later in the conversation, she noted that the wild animals might be a danger for people so they had to be destroyed; however, she then seemed to side with Bart. Bart continued with his argument that the bomb probably never hit the zoo so the animals need not have been destroyed. Thus, these two transcripts demonstrate student interest

in the suffering of the innocent elephants. Their concern did not stop there however.

In a later conversation, Martisse expressed concern for the suffering of innocent, too. This time the focus was on the suffering of people. She began with a reference in her log to *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes*.

Martisse: Well I wrote like Sadako, I wrote Sadako she she got the bomb, the disease and didn't hardly know it. She had it for a while but then just sprung up on her. Then she had //// she tried to fight, and make them them ah paper cranes, but she didn't make enough and then it didn't work.

Bart: I wrote [about

Martisse: [Then

Bart: [when the bomb radiation hit. When the bomb hit, when that bomb hit, America had no right to do that. I don't think they shoulda done that. 'Cause how would they like it if <u>we</u> went and bombed them.

Martisse: [Radiation

Bart: [Radiation

Martisse: [killed a lot of people.

Bart: [killed a lot of people. How would they like it? They wouldn't like it <u>one</u> bit. They would get mad and go do it again. They had no right to do it. (Book Club Transcript, October 29, 1990)

Martisse read her entry, but then Bart interrupted her with his own concern about the injustice of the war. Martisse was not daunted though and continued to finish what she had to say. Bart echoed her comments and wove them into his own. This section of transcript demonstrates how the students were articulating their concern for the effects of radiation on people. This was reflected further in their written papers.

The final copies of the students' synthesis papers revealed how each had identified slightly different themes to discuss (see Table 2). Mondo chose to write about the killing. He began his paper with the following topic sentence: "I'm ging to tell you About killing A log of people And Elephants by the bomb That brop on top of japan" and continued by summarizing the main events associated with the bombings in each story. Martisse, too, chose to summarize major events even

though she identified that caring for others was the theme she chose to write about. In her summary, she included instances in which many of the characters demonstrated how they cared for others. Also resorting to summary, Chris chose to write about survival by recounting events in the book in which the characters tried to survive. Lissa and Bart were the only two who moved away from summary to a synthesis of ideas. Lissa selected caring relationships for her topic and recounted which characters cared about others in the books. Bart decided to write about the suffering of the innocent. Through their synthesis papers, the five students demonstrated how their interests in the characters and the war merged together. Some of their ideas overlap, but each revealed a unique perspective.

As the above log entries, drawing, and transcript revealed, these five students began reading about Japan during World War II with varied, but similar interests. As they continued to write about their ideas, illustrate their thinking, and talk about these, the different themes were dropped as in the case of the cultural differences, or they merged together into one, as did their interest in the war and in the lives of the characters. The next section discusses the implications of this work.

What Does This Group of Five Tell Us About Literature-Based Reading Instruction?

As the school year began, this fifth-grade class began a new literature-based reading program. The five members of the Book Club group began the program with a history of traditional reading instruction and yet they were able to adapt to this new way of reading in school. Findings from this study revealed four things: (a) student thinking about themes presented by text varies over time, (b) instruction plays a key role the development of response, (c) students need multiple means through which to express their response and developing ideas about theme, and (d) teachers need not dominate student interactions to insure they comprehend text and develop a sense of relevant themes.

Student Thinking Varies Over Time

When students began the unit on Japan during World War II, they each had somewhat different interests they wanted to pursue in Book Club. During the first discussion, Bart and Chris focused on their own humorous accounts of a bombing. Martisse and Lissa chose to focus on the character of Sadako. While drawing about the bombing, Mondo also chose to draw the family praying for their dead grandmother. This initial balance of topics of interest foreshadowed the final themes related to the suffering of innocent people during war; however, none of the students selected this theme or indicated an interest in it at the beginning. Only through reading the books over several days; writing their thoughts before, while, and after reading sections of the books; illustrating their ideas through drawings; and interacting within a small group did the students have the opportunity to develop their thinking about the issues presented in the texts.

One might argue that the books alone would have fostered such response. All three of these texts are well-written books presenting powerful images and themes. However, children need time and opportunity to think about and reflect on their own ideas. Rarely do intense interactions, such as the final Book Club meetings in which the children debated significant issues surrounding war, occur in traditional classrooms. It was the combination of time and multiple ways of recording ideas and reactions that contributed to student's developing their sense of theme. If the books alone were responsible, then the students would have concluded at the end of *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes* or any of the other two, that war was wrong. While Bart and Lissa did conclude this, the other three insisted that sometimes nations had to retaliate. This demonstrated that students were reading the text and considering key issues and, at the same time, reaching their own conclusions.

The Role of Instruction

While not the particular focus of this study, the instructional component of this literature-based reading program cannot be denied as it was pivotal in the development of student ideas about theme. First, the writing/representation and Book Club discussions were only one half of the total

reading program. The class also received instruction about what and how to share and participated in Community Share in which the teacher modeled various types of response and provided scaffolding for students as they responded in large group. Second, the teacher selected three books closely united by multiple themes and recognized by experts as quality literature, based on the interests of her students. Third, she provided students guidance in their representations and written responses. Unlike more traditional classes, her questions were not designed to check comprehension. Instead, they focused on the interest of the students. Therefore, these interactions were not just the result of any one factor but of the combination of a teacher's close monitoring of students' interests and needs.

Multiple Opportunities to Respond

By design, this reading program included several means through which students could express their ideas and feelings about the texts they were reading. Not only did they have logs with prompts encouraging written response, but they also had opportunities to draw sections of the text they found appealing and they had daily opportunities to interact in Community Share and Book Club. The focus on these five students revealed that each child displayed a somewhat different pattern in which representations she/he most frequently adopted. Martisse, a strong student, chose to write and draw more than she did to talk. While her log records events in Sadako's life that she found personally appealing, her responses during Book Club remained brief. Though she appeared interested in the talk and served as conductor of the group (McMahon, 1992), she rarely became involved in the discussions.

In contrast, Chris rarely wrote much in his log and only drew one representation of the story, but frequently participated in the discussions. Lissa frequently drew a picture and talked during Book Club, but rarely wrote very much in her log. Mondo maintained a somewhat even balance among the three means by talking, drawing, and speaking a little, but never seeming to adopt a preferred means to represent his ideas. In direct opposition, Bart frequently wrote and drew a lot and tended to dominate the group discussion. While quantity is not a sole determiner of

student participation, this data demonstrated that children have preferences for how they will express their ideas, so no one means is sufficient.

Students Were Able to Conduct Student-Led Groups

One criticism of traditional classroom practice is that the teacher dominates the discussion, asking only comprehension-type questions. Arguments for such practice insist that the teacher needs to check for understanding of the text. The data from this group, collected over the course of five weeks, demonstrated that, when provided with instruction, quality texts, and multiple opportunities to express their thinking, students will come to understand many of the significant themes presented through texts. While they may not always understand all details associated with the text, as with Chris and the custom of sending the candles down the river to commemorate the dead, they will come to understand the major themes presented. For example, no one would question that one of the predominate themes presented in these three books is that war kills innocent, living things, so all people should seriously consider the impact of war and avoid it. Clearly, even the weakest readers in this group understood this message. There was no need for teacher-directed interactions to make the point.

At the same time, the students did not all reach the same conclusions regarding war. Had the teacher directed an interaction about "the" message of the books, she would probably have noted the evils of war. Students might have even restated this on a test. The question remains whether they would have seriously believed it. Through opportunities to pursue their own interests and connect these with their own lives, students reached individual conclusions related to the messages in the books.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study of one group of fifth graders as they participated in a literature-based reading program has revealed interesting findings regarding both the theory of social constructivism and the practical implications for teaching.

Social Constructivist Perspective in an Elementary Classroom

When considering a social constructivist perspective and this study, two key important features merge. First is Bakhtin's theory that meaning is constructed in social contexts. As group members interacted, they construct meanings unique to that group. In addition, each individual is also a member of other social groups in which meanings have also been constructed. Therefore, understanding and interpretation is unique for each individual but also grounded within the current context. As Fish (1980) noted, we are all members of a community of readers who share ideas, reactions, and beliefs.

In this urban fifth-grade classroom, the teacher endeavored to get children to understand that reading included interacting with others about ideas. Further, it required students to read the text, record their ideas, and share these ideas with their peers. Within this one group, three major topics emerged early in their discussions; however, only two of these remained of interest to the group as a whole and to individuals: war and events in the lives of the characters. Further, while some students chose to write more about the characters in the book, the discussions tended to focus more on the war. As a result of the discussions and the texts, students began to connect these two ideas so that they eventually merged into one major theme of how war affects lives. Tracing the group's interactions demonstrates this shift.

However, while the students' interests merged into one similar one, their positions on this varied. For example, students chose different topics on which to focus for their synthesis papers and, in the final discussion, Bart and Lissa were pitted against Chris, Martisse, and Mondo over issues related to war. Key to understanding this is Bakhtin's notion that each individual member of a group is also a member of other social groups. During this class's reading of these books, this nation was positioned at the edge of war and citizens of the world were debating the correct course. Positions on war these fifth graders adopted mirrored those of adults. Therefore, important to note, is that each classroom is only one context or community in which children meet

and interact. As a result, even though this community might share ideas, reactions, and beliefs, they do not take the same position on issues, nor should they.

The second theoretical issue related to this study is Vygotsky's emphasis on the role of the adult in the learning process. He argued that the adult provided the necessary guidance in a child's mental growth through the use of language and signs. This guidance was offered within the child's zone of proximal development so that only tasks too difficult for the child to complete alone required assistance.

The reporting of these data might imply that the teacher in this classroom did little or nothing to prompt this interaction. Nothing could be further from the truth. The instructional design facilitated the development of student thinking. Instruction focused on what and how to share. Log entries encouraged pursuit of individual interests. Book Clubs were student-led, but directed by the teacher, leading to student interactions about ideas related to the book but of interest to them. Finally, Community Share provided all students opportunities to hear what other groups had discussed. All four components--reading, writing/representing, discussion, and instruction--focused on student development of ideas and feelings resulting from the reading of the texts.

Implications for the Classroom

One criticism reformers of traditional reading instruction have is the lack of written opportunities for students to express their ideas. Further, proponents of a literature-based reading program argue that students should have opportunities to express their response in ways other than just through writing. Results from this study support both of these ideas.

First, students need an opportunity to record their reactions to text before, while, and after they read. Such opportunities provide them a record of their developing response. Each of the members of this group pursued areas of interest in the reading logs. Even though the ideas might have received little attention within the Book Club, each student could pursue the topic at will. For example, Martisse continued to focus on the character of Sadako despite the group's limited attention to this.

While opportunities for written reactions to texts are important, they should not be the sole means through which students can respond to their reading. Since written and oral response varies, they need opportunities to express themselves through both means. Further, overreliance on one means might limit a student`s response. For example, Chris , a weak student who seemed limited in how he responded, rarely chose to illustrate any section of the text and his written responses were limited to questions he had about the text instead of ideas he gained from it. In contrast though, his interaction with the group was often reactive, responding to other's ideas instead of introducing his own. As a result, he always participated in the group's interactions, thus, facilitating his own growing understanding of the texts.

A second criticism reformers have of traditional classroom teaching is the recurrent, interactional pattern: teacher question, student response, and teacher evaluation. Often this pattern emerges during reading instruction because of the felt need to test student's comprehension of the text. The results from this study reveal that, even though comprehension questions were not a integral part of the reading program, these students did indeed understand not only the content of the texts but also the major themes. Book Club discussions were not dominated by the teacher but they covered major aspects of the books. Such interactions allowed children to present their own, multiple interpretations of the texts without judgment of the teacher. The log prompts and context of Book Club made it clear that they could pursue their own areas of interest. While the group sometimes chose to focus on clarifying events in the book, they also chose to pursue personal, affective response. Their interactions were not guided by a search for the "correct" answers for a test. At the same time, individual children did not simply follow the dictates of one dominant student. While some students might have dominated some discussions, each individual continued to write about areas of interest and frequently challenged another about his or her ideas.

Concluding Comments

Providing students a variety of means through which to respond to text enables them to develop their ideas. This literature-based reading program provided students opportunities to

interact in student-led, but teacher-directed, heterogeneous groups in which they shared log entries, drawn representations of the texts, and their own thinking. Such opportunities allowed students time and means through which to record, review, and revise their developing thoughts and emotions evoked by text, thus making reading more personal and more meaningful.

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APPENDIX

Explanation of Transcript Notations

1 4	Number notation at far left indicates a new speaker.
0 1	Number notation in second column indicates counter number on the transcription machine noting passage of seconds.
/ / /	Indicates pauses within a speaker's turn. Each note (/) indicates one second.
[	Indicates overlapping talk.
...	Indicates a speaker's thoughts were interrupted by talk, but the other speaker might have begun during a slight pause in the first speaker's turn.
—	Indicates the speaker stressed this word. For example, "I want you to do that <u>now</u>."
( )	Indicates my comments, including my interpretation of how someone stated something, or what other group members were doing at the same time.
" "	Indicates the speaker was reading from a log or the book.
.	Indicates slight pauses in speech.
(?)	Indicates the speaker said something that was not distinguishable on the tape.